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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Network Women in Development Europe, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Urgent need of gender justice and an economy of care

For more than three decades, official documents have repeated the fact that women worldwide make up the largest group affected by hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Social exclusion and discrimination have been found to be the root causes in most countries. Nevertheless, few Governments are eager and willing to effectively combat the abuse and violation of women's basic human rights with adequate measures and means.

In October 2010, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon promised to mobilize $40 billion to improve access to health care for women and children, in order to close the biggest gap in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. What has happened to this initiative? The outrageously high maternal death rates are an indicator that women's basic health needs are far from being met, and that there continues to be a gap between urban and rural areas. So far, policies, strategies and interventions by Governments and international institutions have not made a significant impact on a better infrastructure for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, an upgrading of the fight against HIV/AIDS and other treatable diseases, measures to stop violence against women, better access to water and sanitation for the poor and a consequent reduction in child mortality. The situation is particularly critical for women in fragile, conflict and post-conflict countries, whose lives are threatened by the most severe risks.

Lack of access to health care, education, economic resources and political participation has a disastrous impact on the lives and livelihoods of women worldwide, as it impinges on their role as productive agents. The burden women carry because of the care work they do in the household represents a gender-specific limitation for women, especially in rural areas where public social services are largely absent.

In analysing the situation of rural women, account must also be taken of industrialized agriculture within the context of the globalized, aggressively liberalized economy that has emerged in recent decades. This model is characterized by the horizontal and vertical integration of commercial agricultural production, food processing and distribution and trading systems, with oligopolies and even monopolies in certain segments, which has created a surplus of industrial food that is wasted or dumped in global markets, destroying local production. The industrial model of food production is responsible for drastic losses in terms of biodiversity and soil fertility, contributes to climate change, causes forced migration and is directly related to hunger and malnutrition in rural areas. Furthermore, the massively increased financial speculation on commodities has led to the severe food crisis that occurred in 2007 and 2008 and that has made consumers in general, but low-income, women-led households in particular, extremely vulnerable to rising prices.

As a result of the multiple crises (energy, food, finances and social reproduction) conditions for women in rural areas, especially in African but also in Asian and Latin American countries, seem to have become even worse. The privatization of and the rush for land, water and other natural resources by transnational companies affects women very strongly, as it is especially rural poor

women in particular who depend most directly on access to common public goods such as forests, so-called wasteland and rivers. The non-recognition of human rights by agribusiness and the extractive industries has exacerbated women's vulnerability and increased their exposure to sexual and economic violence. Basic human rights like the right to food, water and an adequate livelihood are ignored, people are swept away from their traditional land and women are put into even more marginalized situations as migrants, farm workers, workers in the informal economy or household employees.

Green economy as an answer?

After the failure of the climate change summit held in Copenhagen in 2009, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, together with the United Nations Environment Programme, promoted a "global green new deal" to overcome the financial, energy and climate crises. Network Women in Development Europe (WIDE) supports the efforts to reach a real "global green new deal" but is critical of the fact that in the current proposals the driving force remains economic growth and not the redistribution of wealth and income; gender justice is hardly mentioned. WIDE demands that any model of green development that is proposed put forward the human rights framework from the outset and is coherent with the development paradigm that women are struggling for globally: social and gender justice along with the ecological sustainability of economic activities. Therefore, WIDE considers the vision formulated in the "women's action agenda" almost 20 years ago in the context of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, still valid in many core aspects. Starting with a critique of the concept of the free market and economic growth, it advocates a new ethic of economy and its relation to nature, for the respect and protection of biological and cultural diversity, demilitarization, justice between North and South and the empowerment of women through the promotion of democratic, reproductive and resources-oriented rights. In the current situation, which is characterized by multiple crises and where many previously formulated goals and international protocols regarding environmental protection and women's human rights have not been achieved, it becomes urgent to rethink strategic options and starting points for transforming the current economic model.

For the empowerment of rural women, we need to move forward in the construction of long-term development paradigms based on women's and people's rights, including indigenous peoples' rights, rather than on profit maximization and a supposed economic efficiency that is not providing well-being for the large majority of human beings and especially not for women. It is necessary to promote a model of green economy based on redistribution (between States, societies and generations) rather than on infinite growth. This is why the social sector, including the "care" economy, and the manifold small-scale agriculture and local food production systems have to be recognized as key players in alternative economic models.

WIDE has found compelling evidence that grass-roots women in alliance with feminist scientists, academics and politicians can and must play a key role in a constructive process of transformation.

To promote women's empowerment and agency, especially in rural areas, WIDE urges Governments and United Nations bodies:

- To improve and implement laws that secure equal access to land and means of production for women and men
- To ensure that the existing formal and informal marriage and inheritance systems do not discriminate against women or girls
- To investigate and take adequate legal and juridical steps against structural violence against women within the family and at all sites of economic activity
- To promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially in rural areas
- To provide affordable and high-quality public infrastructure (water, electricity, sanitation, social services, education)
- To ensure that women participate in the design of development strategies at all levels
- To strengthen women's participation in conflict resolution in fragile or post-conflict countries
- To promote ecologically sustainable means of local food production, distribution and consumption, including in ways that make use of women's accumulated knowledge and experiences
- To improve women's access to sustainable technologies, credit and the market
- To strengthen the human and labour rights of migrant women, women working on farms and in agricultural export processing zones
- To put a moratorium on large-scale agricultural investments ("land grabbing")
- To stop financial speculation on food and natural resources
- To take into account and strengthen women's agency in programmes to combat hunger instead of creating new forms of dependency (for example by limiting the use of infant formula and/or high-energy food to defined emergency situations)
- To implement the principle of food sovereignty in agricultural and trade policies
- To recognize women's labour in subsistence and small-holder economies as well as their reproductive work, in measuring the national economy
- To implement the Beijing Platform for Action, which sets out actions for Governments and transnational companies to comply with national and international legislation and conventions, especially those related to women's new and traditional economic activities and environmental issues
- To agree to a fair distribution of wealth and promote internationally coordinated tax systems (financial transaction taxes, environmental taxes, an end to corporate tax evasion and the closure of tax havens), in order to finance sustainable, human rights-based development

WIDE calls on the Governments of developed countries to fulfil their obligation to respect the integral human rights of women worldwide, especially where bilateral and multilateral relations shape policies and programmes through aid, trade, investment, and/or other types of agreements.